No. 76

# The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"You must not take it too much to heart, dear," he soothed her gently. "It is just about what I expected. What does it matter after all if they do slight us."

R. of M. G., No. 78.

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THE DOCTOR had just accosted Wayne concerning his wife's murder. "Doctor," Wayne began, his voice even, "I don't want to offer any explanations as to the causes which led up to this murder. But I'll tell you this: I came home unexpectedly and found her in the arms of another man. I lost my head—and stabbed her."

"But you will be held for her murder, Wayne. I dare say she can't last another thirty minutes."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"I know," he declared, keeping himself under control. "In fact she is dead now. I just came from her room."

"And you stand there and tell me this without the least emotion?" Dr. Chalmers cried, incredulous. "My God, man, I can not believe such a thing possible."

Wayne's face hardened.

"What did you expect me to do, go into hysterics and play the hypocrit?" he demanded harshly. "To be perfectly frank with you, I can not even say that I am sorry."

"But it is murder, and——"

"I know all that," was the bitter interruption. "I'll take what is coming to me without whimpering and pleading for mercy."

The physician stared at the murderer. He was dumbfounded.

"I am extremely sorry to be mixed up in an affair like this, Mr. Wayne. It places me in a decidedly unpleasant position. I shall be compelled to give very damaging evidence against you. I suppose you'll give yourself up."

Wayne did not reply at once. He appeared to be debating.

"What else can I do?" he declared at length. "It

would be foolish to dodge the issue."

The physician, apparently somewhat in doubt, walked up to Wayne and laid a hand on his shoulder. It was very evident that he was laboring under a forcibly subdued excitement.

"Look here, old man," he said in all seriousness. "A man of my profession is regarded as a public servant. It is my duty to inform the police at once of what has taken place here. Frankly, I don't like the idea of playing the informer in this case.

"I shall remain silent if you give me your word of honor that you will give yourself up immediately. You——"

"You have my word," the other broke in with unnecessary vehemence. "If that is not enough you may do what you consider your duty and call the police."

Dr. Chalmers reached for his grip.

"Your word is sufficient," he said gravely. "I wish you luck."

"Thanks," Wayne responded and turned away.

The physician left the house, fully believing that the murderer would keep his promise.

But he had scarcely closed the front door behind him when Wayne muttered an oath and laughed mockingly to himself.

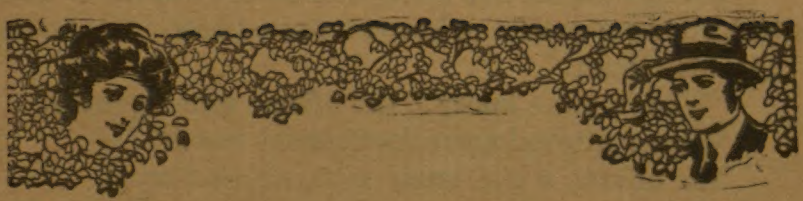
He wavered for a few seconds, then ran upstairs to his room.

It was the work of a few minutes to place all his valuables into a traveling bag. This done, he retraced his steps and went back downstairs.

As he stood in the hall, swayed by a momentary indecision, he heard his dead wife's maid sobbing.

"God," he gasped. "I hate to do this thing, but there is no other way. They wouldn't give me a chance if I was arrested and brought to trial."

Pulling his hat over his eyes he stole from the house unobserved.



## Chapter 230

## THE TRANSFORMATION

UTSIDE the street-lights oggled him maliciously. Wayne, standing in the chilly darkness of the early morning, shivered as if with an ague. A feeling of disgust and loathing, amounting to physical nausea, swept over him as he thought of the brutal, revolting crime he had committed.

But the die was cast and there was no retracing. All the powers on earth could not bring Marian back to life. Terror and fear gripped him by the throat and made breathing a torture.

He started off in a walk, and he did not know that he was running until a policeman halted him. His heart was in his mouth.

"What's your hurry," the officer asked gruffly.

Wayne uttered some incoherent words.

The officer, a big, burly man, shook him.

"Why are you running?" he demanded, then his tone changed quickly as he recognized the man. "Ah, it is you, Mr. Wayne. I beg your pardon."

"That's alright," the fugitive replied, his voice very small. "I am in a hurry to make a train for the east. It leaves at four-thirty, and I have just twenty minutes."

"Then run along, sir," came back politely. "I hope you make it."

Wayne wasted no time, but ran on with a murmured word of thanks. The officer strode in the other direction, swinging his club, little dreaming that he had allowed a murderer to escape.

The fugitive halted within sight of the railroad

station, then turned and looked back.

Assuring himself that no one was following him, he suddenly changed his course and headed for the railroad station.

When he perceived another police officer coming toward him, he quickly hid in a dark hallway of a tenement building and waited until he had passed.

Upon re-appearing, he glanced furtively up and down the street. The officer was no longer in sight.

Fortune favored him, for at the railroad station he found a train ready to leave for New York, his chosen destination.

He climbed aboard quickly. As soon as he arrived in New York, he took a taxi and drove to one of the many wharfs.

Several merchantmen and a few tramp steamers lay at anchor. Wayne looked them over carefully, then selected the one with a strange design painted on its smoke-stack.

He went aboard with an air that seemed to indicate that he was thoroughly familiar with the method of approach.

A rough-looking sailor on nightwatch stopped him as he was about to go below.

"Captain Andersen is an old friend of mine," Wayne said handing the sailor a five dollar bill. "I must see him on some urgent business without delay."

"You'll find him in his cabin, sir," the sailor informed him. "He was up here a moment ago. I'll show you where——"

"Nevermind, my friend," Wayne cut in. "I know where to find him."

A minute later Wayne stood face to face with a bulky brute of a man. He was true to the type found among law-defying crooks and smugglers found in many

seaports.

There was something singularly repellent about this man.

The closely cropped hair, the coarse, bloated features, and the furtively blinking eyes suggested the ex-convict.

"Well, if it ain't Walter Wayne," he cried with a foul oath. "What——"

The unexpected visitor quickly raised his hand and put a finger to his lips.

"Not so loud, please," he warned in a whisper. "And whatever you do, don't mention my name. Someone might hear."

The captain nodded with an ugly grin.

"What's up," he inquired, his pig-like eyes gleaming with curiosity. "You look scared."

Wayne flung his traveling bag on the little table and almost fell into a chair. He was trembling in every limb and some time elapsed before he could speak.

"I—I am in trouble, Anderson," he faltered at last. "You must help me out."

"Of course, I'll help you, old, man," the other, retorted quickly. "Do you think I'd let the son of the best friend I ever had in the lurch? Not much.

"If it had not been for your father, I'd still be doing time for tapping Bud Reilly on the head. Don't you worry. Tell me now, what is the trouble, Walter?"

"For heaven's sake, don't use my name!" the fugitive warned again. "The police may be after me right now."

Captain Andersen evidently could not see the serious side of it, for he slapped his thigh and began to laugh immoderately.

"What happened?" he exclaimed, still laughing. "Did the prohibition officer catch you smuggling whis-

key, or did you rob a bank? Maybe you stole another man's wife and went to run off with her?"

Wayne did not enjoy this at all. He was too nervous. When he hesitated, the captain showed his impatience.

"Out with it!" the latter cried. "You know you can trust me."

"I know I can, and that is why I came," was the slow retort. "It is a damned unpleasant story, but I might as well begin at the beginning so you can understand why I did it."

He licked his dry lips for a few moments, then related everything — how he had placed his faith in a woman already marked, how she had deceived him, and how he caught her in the arms of another man.

As he told about the murder, his voice trailed off in a frightened whisper.

"You know what it means if the police catch me," he ended. "I'll have to get away before dawn. What is your price?"

Captain Andersen shot a glance at the bulging traveling bag on the table and grinned.

"Yes, it is there," Wayne said, observing the greedy look. "I am well supplied with ready cash if that means anything to you. How much do you want?"

The other thought for a little while. The steamer was loaded with merchandise for an East Indian port. The clearance papers were in his possession, and he was privileged to leave the port whenever he was ready.

Another thing, the records showed that the steamer carried no passengers. It made a safe hiding place for any criminal.

Captain Andersen had been waiting for daylight to come.

There was nothing to prevent him from lifting the

anchor and starting immediately, but he was too shrewd to let the fact be known.

"Well, I'll tell you," he began at last in a slow drawl. "You know it is against the law to leave without the proper clearance papers.

"I must be very careful not to come again in conflict with the law. After Reilly's murder I was paroled, thanks to your father's influence.

"It would go hard with me if I am caught deliberately violating the law. I have only half a cargo, but I am willing to stretch a point to save you. But of course, I will have to be paid pretty good to take the chance. I'd say ten thousand dollars wouldn't be too much."

Although the sum named was far in excess of what he expected, Wayne rose quickly and opened his traveling bag.

He drew out a number of neatly done up packages, each containing one thousand dollars in currency.

Counting ten of them, he shoved them toward the captain.

"There is your money," he said, gasping, and trying vainly to hide his constantly growing fear. "I don't care where you are bound for, but let's be off at once."

Captain Andersen's little eyes shone avariciously.

His hands trembled visibly as he gathered up the money and put it in the ship's safe. He had made what he considered a very good bargain.

And he smiled wickedly, for the traveling bag still contained more than ten times the amount he received.

As he turned to face the lone passenger, the expression of his eyes changed. They became indeed very sympathetic.

Wayne, shaking with fear, was a pitiful spectacle to behold.

"By God, you look worried," he said, laying both

hands on the fugitive's shoulders. "What you need right now is a bracer."

Producing a quart bottle of whiskey, he gave Wayne a glass of it filled to the rim. That latter drank it eagerly. The result was almost immediately perceptible.

A faint color crept into his cheeks and he straightened up.

"Give me another, Andersen," he grinned.

"As many as you want, old man," Andersen replied readily.

Wayne, urged by the captain, drank several more. This, coupled with the intense excitement under which he was laboring, produced a stupor from which he did not awake until five hours later.

When he opened his eyes he found himself lying on a clean bed in a neat cabin.

The throbbing of the engine, the gentle swaying of the ship and the blue expanse of water visible through the little round window, informed him that they were under way.

And although his throat was parched with thirst and his head ached fiercely, he rose and went on deck. The cooling morning breeze felt good.

Then there was that feeling of security from arrest. The steamer was miles and miles away from New York and land was no longer in sight. He gave a great sigh of relief and went in search of Captain Andersen.

The latter, accompanied by one of his mates, was pacing the deck. Wayne might have noticed something peculiar in the manner of these two men as they approached him, but he didn't.

Both were under the influence of strong drink, Then they were obviously two of a kind.

Instead of stopping the mate walked on, leaving

Captain Andersen alone with Wayne. Had the latter been mentally alert, he would have seen the meaning glance exchanged between them before they parted.

"Well, how are you?" the captain cried boisterously.

The fugitive placed a hand on his feverish temple.

"Headache," he said.

"That so?" the other laughed again. "I have a good remedy for that. Come with me."

They descended to the captain's cabin.

"You know, it always takes poison to kill poison," exclaimed Andersen. "Take another drink and I'll guarantee you that your headache will be gone in ten minutes."

Wayne, again urged, drank the liquor. It seemed that this was what he needed, for his headache began to leave.

"You are a good doctor," he smiled. "Fill that prescription once more."

Another drink was forthcoming instantly. Wayne rather liked the sensation it produced. He experienced a strange elation. He wanted to talk.

Captain Andersen proved to be a patient listener. And while they sat and chatted, the glass was filled again and again.

"By the way," the captain said as the conversation lagged for a moment. "I put that traveling bag of yours in the safe. It is the best place for it. I'll give it back to you whenever you want it."

"That's alright," Wayne replied stupidly. "I'll trust you with it. What good is money anyway if you can't spend it, hey, captain?"

The latter uttered another boisterous laugh.

"You are right, my boy. You are right."

Within another hour the fugitive was helpless

drunk. He felt happier than he ever was in his life.

It had made him forget his troubles and he began to enjoy himself in a fashion common to men thoroughly saturated with whiskey.

From that day on Wayne drank incessantly. And with the constant drinking the transformation started. It dulled his wits, benumbed his senses and aroused within him the instinct of a brute.

He sought quarrels with the sailors with the result that frequent fights occurred.

Wayne was a perfect specimen of manhood, of athletic built and he had the courage of a lion. He feared no man, for he had whipped the biggest sailor on the ship in short order.

Captain Andersen sought to quiet him several times, but he got a round of vicious epithets for his pains.

Shortly before the steamer reached its destination, Andersen spent a great deal of time with the mate.

Their conversations were carried on in guarded whispers. And it was well that Wayne did not hear them.

It was close to evening when port was reached. Wayne, as usual, was helplessly drunk. He had voiced a desire to go on shore, but Captain Andersen persuaded him to stay aboard.

"You can't afford to take any foolish chances," the latter said. "Bombay is a port overrun with British custom officers, who are on the best of terms with the Americans. Who knows but that they are looking for you."

Wayne, staggering and cursing, was led to his cabin, where he fell asleep singing:

"A sailor's life for me."

The ship remained in the harbor of Bombay for three days. During that time the fugitive was constant-

ly under the influence of liquor.

Captain Andersen had laid in a new supply of whiskey, and the night of the departure he coaxed Wayne to drink more than the usual amount.

But the fugitive had passed the stage of wanting to be urged. He craved for it. He drank himself into a state of absolute mental and physical indifference.

This time he was not carried to his cabin. The captain held a short consultation with the mate.

The latter, having taken over the night-watch, hurriedly prepared a small boat with food to last a few days. At the hour of twelve the ship left port, directed toward the Maldive Islands.

When the distance had been half covered, Wayne, still helpless, was placed in the boat which was cast adrift.

Captain Andersen ordered full steam ahead. When morning dawned the steamer changed its course and headed straight for Capetown.

The sudden disappearance of the lone passenger aroused little or no comment.

Most of the sailors seemed to take it for granted that he had gone ashore at Bombay and was left behind.

Only the captain and the mate knew what had become of him. And they laughed greedily as they divided the contents of Wayne's traveling bag.

Chapter 251

## CAST ADRIFT

WHEN WAYNE opened his eyes he got the surprise of his life. The first thing he saw, was the endless blue canopy of a cloudless sky. He blinked several times trying to gather his mental faculties. He was lying flat on his back motionless, except for his eyelids that kept on winking unbelievingly. He was groping vainly for the path of truth.

He raised himself with a physical effort, stared and stared. There was nothing but water all around him. And he found himself in a small boat in the bottom of which he saw some food and a pair of oars.

Then suddenly the frightful truth dawned upon him. He had been placed in the boat while insensible and helpless, then cast adrift.

Captain Andersen had done this for a reason which at once became apparent.

But the loss of the money and bonds did not hurt him so much as the bitter realization that he had been tricked and left at the mercy of the elements.

He had lost faith in women, and now one of his own sex in the guise of a friend had played him false.

With every reserve atom of his remaining mental strength he battled against this thing that was stupefying him. But it was like a hidden snake, about to fasten its fangs into his vitals.

He swore a fierce oath and for a while demeaned himself like a raving maniac.

By degrees he regained his mental equilibrium, calmed down, and was one more able to frame a clear

thought.

His position was extremely hazardous and perplexing. He had no compass that might give him the direction.

He looked at the sun which stood high. But that did not inform him in what direction the nearest land lay.

Seizing the oars he rowed aimlessly about for a while, then gave it up.

In the meantime the sun began to sink lower and lower in the west. Wayne spent the most horrible night imaginable.

He knew that he was safe enough as long as the sea remained calm. But if a storm blew up, he was lost —utterly lost.

He shivered at the thought.

But the fates were kind. Not a cloud marred the beautiful starry firmament. Only now and then a slight breeze made itself felt.

By morning he experienced a maddening thirst. He reached over the side of the boat, cupping his hand. The first mouth full of water he spit out with a curse. It was greasy with salt and make him sick.

As the sun rose the heat parched his lips. He tried to eat some food, but he had not sufficient moisture in his mouth to masticate it. It nearly choked him.

Wayne would have given ten years of his life for a cooling drink of water, and twenty for a good drink of whiskey.

He was fast becoming hysterical, and wept and cursed by turns.

It was late in the afternoon when he noticed a tiny trail of smoke to the east. It was a ship.

But doubt and fear beset him anew. What if it was an American or British ship? How could he explain

his presence here? And what would happen if they discovered in him the fugitive murderer?

Going over the situation, he came to the conclusion that almost any sort of death was preferrable to the slow torture of famishing.

The water invited him, but a short distance away he saw something which brought a low cry of horror to his lips. Something was moving swiftly in the direction of the boat.

Something, like the shary edge of a knife, cleft the water and left a little ripple behind.

He watched for a few minutes, fascinated.

"A shark—my God," he gasped.

The horror of the situation drove him frantic.

And now he recalled having read that sharks often follow small boats preceeding a storm so that they can devour the unfortunate human being after having been thrown into the water.

With a terrified glance he followed the movements of the monster, whose fins, now plainly visible, gleamed in the sun.

The tiger of the sea had suddenly changed its course. He was circling around the boat. Once it dived, its huge tail lashing the water. An anxious moment followed.

Presently the shark reappeared, joined by another. It had evidently called its mate from the deep.

Both of them were circling the boat now.

Wayne looked away. The trail of smoke in the east was growing larger. The smoke-stack became discernible. It seemed to rise until the hull of a strange looking ship hove into full view.

He tore off his shirt and began to wave it in an effort to attract attention.

Then he sat down again and began to row with all

his might. The little boat shot forward, the sharks keeping pace with it.

Although his throat was dry and his swollen tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, big beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead and rolled down his cheeks.

The wind was rising and the sea became restless. The waves rose, threatening disaster.

The little boat danced on them like a nutshell. The sharks seemed to have disappeared. Wayne breathed a sigh of relief.

Suddenly he saw a long, dark-green object close to the boat. As it rose with the next wave, he uttered an inartulate cry. It was one of the sharks.

Its hideous head, the wolfish eyes, and the big jaws, displaying two rows of long, fang-like teeth, struck terror to his heart. The monster evidently expected the little boat to capsize any moment, and its jaws snapped like the released spring of a rat trap.

Wayne looked wildly in the direction of the steamer, which seemed to be moving with the speed of a snail. His lips were framing incoherent words of prayer and curses alternately.

"My God—hurry—hurry!" he gibbered.

Only a short distance separated him now from the ship. He could plainly see a number of men standing at the railing.

One of them, obviously the commander of the craft, was gesticulating with his hands and pointing in the direction of Wayne.

With a last, despairing effort the latter put his fast waning strength to the oars. As he glanced into the water, he noticed that the number of sharks had been multiplied. He counted four of them.

"Throw me a rope!" he cried. "Throw me a

rope!"

The man in charge of the steamer must not have heard Wayne's imploring cry for he made no move.

He as well as those lined up against the railing with him, were apparently paying more attention to the sharks than to the man in such deadly peril.

These wolves of the deep, doubtlessly aware of the fact that their prey was about to be snatched away from them, lashed the small boat with their tails.

One of them crossed under it, almost upsetting it.

Wayne retained his upright posture only with an effort. No power on earth could save him if he dropped into the swirling waters.

By this time the steamer had come to a stop within about fifteen feet of the row-boat. With all the strength left to him, Wayne pulled at the oars. At last he came within reach of the rope thrown to him.

"Thank God" he gasped as he clung to it.

But it was by no means an easy task to hold on as the sailors began to haul him up. Wayne's hands, benumbed with cold and exertion, failed to hold it. Underneath the boat was slipping away.

"Throw me a ladder!" he begged piteously as he looked up at the long line of faces above him. "Throw me a ladder. I can't hold the rope."

On the face of it it seemed rather out of the ordinary that the captain of the ship should use an ordinary rope to save the man in such dreadful danger. Rope ladders are always employed in cases of this kind.

He had taken it for granted that Wayne had the needed strength to hold on to the rope.

This was a mistake—a fatal mistake.

The sharks had begun to leap out of the water, snapping at the heels of the man who hung suspended.

Wayne was breathing heavily. Every breath cost

him a new effort. But he hung on grimly. Every jerk at the rope meant excruciating pain. Only a few feet more and he would be safe.

All of a sudden his strength gave out. His one hand began to slip, then the other.

Several of the men were on their knees above, trying to reach him. The sharks were milling around, still hopeful.

And then Wayne released his hold and dropped.

Some of the men standing at the railing closed their eyes to shut out the frightful vision of the tragedy below.

Wayne had dropped right in the midst of the four sharks. They made a simultaneous attack the instant the man reached the water. The result was that they tore him literally in half.

For a few moments the vicious beasts were fighting among themselves as to who had the right for sole possession.

The water, churning on the surface, became crimson with blood. Within five minutes not a single shark was to be seen. They had dived and disappeared.

Walter Wayne had found a horrible end.

"I guess that ends it," was the unsympathetic comment of the captain. "Those sharks evidently enjoyed their lunch."

Silence greeted these remarks. For the most part the men under his command were still humane enough to realize the enormity of the tragedy they just witnessed.

Even as the steamer turned around and pursued its course, they stood in awed groups discussing the incident. They had never before been called upon to witness anything like it. And they hoped that it would never happen again.

Among them was one man who had been saved from sharks while swimming. He could still feel the shivers go up and down his spine.

He said little but thought a great deal. And his thoughts were not at all complimentary to the captain of the ship. He regarded the latter's efforts to save Wayne as criminal carelessness.

## Chapter XIII

## IN THE WILDS OF CANADA.

PHILLIP GORDON had been closeted with the chief of police for over an hour in the latter's office. During that time he had told a great deal more than was really necessary. He admitted that the woman whom he suspected of having sent the poisoned candy to the governess of his children, was his wife.

He also stated that the motive behind the attempted murder was jealousy. When questioned by the police chief, he admitted blushingly, that Miss Desmond was a very beautiful woman.

His obvious confusion while discussing her, set his listener to thinking.

"Did your wife have reasons to be jealous of this Miss Desmond?" the chief inquired casually.

There was a sudden flash in Gordon's eyes.

"Absolutely none!" he retorted. "If you entertain any such ideas, sir, please dismiss them from your mind. Miss Desmond is not the type of a woman who would accept the attentions of a married man."

"Not even if he were a wealthy one like you, Mr. Gordon?" the other smiled. "And you are her employer which makes——"

Gordon's fist came down on the police chief's desk with a crash.

"Which makes no difference," he supplied angrily. "I have always treated Miss Desmond with the respect due her as a lady. She was everything to my children that a mother could be. I owe her more than I can ever

repay.

"And I am absolutely determined to bring the woman who tried deliberately to murder her in such a stealthy manner to justice.

"Now, do not interrupt me," he went on with increasing vehemence as the police chief raised a hand. "I know what you would say. There will be no end of scandal because that woman still bears my name. There was a time when I dreaded scandal, but I have gotten over that.

"Come what may — and I am prepared for it, I want to see her behind prison bars. I am not asking you to do anything out of the ordinary, chief. The box of candy has been kept practically intact.

"We must find out where it was brought. The person who sold it will no doubt be able to furnish a description of the purchaser. That is all we need for a starter. A good description of the buyer of that candy is most important.

"And then?" the other asked with another smile.

"It will be up to you and your detectives to locate the woman if she is still in Miami," replied Phil. "I shall remain here until she has been prosecuted to the full extent of the law."

"And suppose we don't find her in this city?" came the next question.

"Then I'll employ the best detective agency in the country," was the prompt rejoinder. "And I'll assist in the search though it will take me to the end of the world."

Gordon's pale features and the ominous flash in his eyes told of his determination. A few more details were discussed, then he departed.

During the next few days he was a very busy man. Every morning about nine o'clock found him at the office

of the chief of police. Accompanied by two detectives every candy store in the city was visited.

In each one the fateful box of candy was shown to the proprietor.

Finally they found the person who sold it. He was a dapper young man with a few stray hairs on his upper lip.

"I sold that to a very good-looking woman," he declared before any questions were asked.

"Describe her to us," one of the detectives said.

The description was forthcoming instantly, and it fit Alice Gordon in every particular.

As the physician in charge of the case declared that the poison in the candy was arsenic, the next step was to find the drugstore and the clerk who sold it to the woman.

This very important information came within the next hour. Again the description he gave of the purchaser fit Alice.

And now every doubt having been removed, the next task was to locate the woman. Every hotel and boarding house was searched.

Every house which had a "Rooms To Let" sign in the window, was entered.

Finally it was learned that Alice had left Miami in the company of a man whose name could not be ascertained. They had taken a train for Chicago.

Philip Gordon made instant arrangements to return home with the children. The trip was not devoid of a certain degree of enjoyment because Miss Desmond was also one of his traveling companions.

She no longer attempted to dissuade him from finding Alice and bringing her to justice because she had come to realize the utter futility of it.

And Gordon rather felt relieved at having the

children with him on the trip. Between them and the lovely governess he managed to have a better time than he had anticipated under the circumstances.

Upon their arrival at Oak Manor, he gave instructions to the servants that under no condition must his wife be allowed to enter the grounds.

He took every possible precautionary measure in order to prevent a second attack on Miss Desmond's life.

This done, he went to the Chicago office of the Burns Detective Agency. He stated his case tersely and insisted that no expense be spared to find Alice.

Within three days he had the information that Alice had gone from Chicago to Detroit, and that city she had crossed the border into Canada.

The restlessness which possessed him urged him on. Without saying anything about his intention to the detectives, he took the trail.

Nothing could have suited him better than to be able to bring Alice back himself and deliver her into the hands of the law.

But Gordon had gone on a dangerous mission. He knew little or nothing about the wilds of Canada.

However, he did know that Fredericks owned a cottage somewhere near a lake, and he more than suspected that he would find his wife in the company of this known libertine.

With his face set in hard lines he set out one morning from a small town not far from the Canadian border.

He had all the necessary instructions and before night he hoped to meet Alice with her lover.

He had just been rowed across a lake by a French-Canadian, who offered to accompany him further.

"Not necessary," Phil commented gruffly as he paid the man liberally. "I think I'll find the way myself.

Thank you just the same," he added with a half smile.

Although autumn was pretty far advanced, the atmosphere was unusually warm.

It reminded him of Indian summer he used to enjoy so much at home. With the perspiration oozing out of every pore, he walked on rapidly through the beaten paths which led him on.

Suddenly he came upon another small lake. This puzzled him. Which way was he to turn?

Without knowing it, he chose the wrong direction. Instead of going to the left, he went to the right. He did not realize that he was lost until the noon sun shone through the trees.

The sight of a log cabin was welcome indeed. A crude porch ran along the entire front Perhaps the man who occupied this cabin could give him some information as to the right direction.

And so with an expectant smile on his face he strode upon the porch and knocked.

There was no response. For a long moment he waited, then stepped off the porch. Someone must be within, for smoke was curling lazily from the chimney.

Going back on the porch, he repeated his knock with more force and waited. This time he received a response. A voice from within muttered something, and a few seconds later the cabin door was swung open by a woman.

Gordon fell back, startled.

The woman was rather tall and voluptuously curved beneath a kimono of soiled silk, which she held together below her throat with a flattened and well-shaped hand.

On her bosom, just above the fingers which held the garment he noted a spatter of something that looked like blood.

She might have been thirty or thirty-two at the most. Her features were regular and very good to look upon.

Her large, sensually-lipped mouth, vividly red, impressed Gordon with a vague unpleasantness, and her big dark eyes looked into his without fear.

"What do you want?" she asked in a curiously stilled voice.

Phil Gordon, for the moment, was at a loss what to reply.

How could he explain his presence here in the Canadian mountains to this woman?

For the most part people living in log houses were outlaws who resented the coming of strangers unless they were able to give a good excuse.

"I—I am a mining engineer," he fibbed. "And I have lost my way."

The woman stared at him as if she had not heard his words.

And then Gordon became conscious that the dark stains on the bosom of the woman's kimono were moving under the strong throb of her heart.

"I am looking for the cottage of a friend of mine," he spoke again. "It is somewhere up here near one of the lakes. Perhaps you know him. His name is Fredericks, and he——"

He stopped as ghastly pallor overspread the woman's face But not a sound came from her lips.

She darted a look past him toward the lake beyond, then apprehensively back over her shoulder into the cabin.

"Perhaps your husband——" Gordon hazarded.

At the last word the woman, with astonishing suddeness, burst into sobs that were almost hysterical and buried her face in her hands.

Gordon stepped over the door sill.

Forgetful of his own problem for the moment, he besought her to tell him her trouble. She shook her head and sank into a rough chair.

Bewildered, he glanced about him for a clue to her distress.

The place was the usual cabin living room of the wilderness.

There was a large stove, a wide, blanketed bunk, and near one window a home-made table, where the sun fell on a litter of soiled dishes.

At the back, another partly closed door indicated a room beyond.

The woman was weeping constantly and kept on wringing her hands. With two strides he was at her side and laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Won't you tell me what's gone wrong?" he asked gently. "If there is anything I can do, I'll be only too glad. I am not used to seeing a woman weeping like you are doing now. Won't you——"

Phil did not finish the last sentence. His attention returned to the partly closed door of the adjoining room, which was swinging open of its own weight.

His eyes was held by what lay on the rough board floor, the stiff, death-like figure of a man.

A piece of canvas was drawn over the lower part of the body, but the dim light from a cheesecloth-covered window filtered down on the still face and tumbled hair.

Something like flecks of foam lay on the heavy black beard about the mouth.

"Who—who is that?" Gordon gasped.

The woman did not answer and her weeping continued.

"Who is that? Tell me?" he demanded, shaking her with some force.

This seemed to bring her out of the state of hysteria.

"My—my husband," she sobbed. "Oh, my poor husband. He died to-day, and I——"

Gordon, in sudden contrition for his former bruskness, tried to comfort her. He asked a number of questions which were all answered amid new showers of tears.

At the end of half an hour he had learned that the wōman's husband was a trapper.

She told him that he had awakened that mōrning, apparently in the best of health, but after lunch, while he was in the storeroom getting out his lynx traps for the approaching winter, he had been taken by violent convulsions.

It was ptomaine poisoning, she thought, from some canned peaches he had eaten.

He had died in her arms just a few minutes before Gordon knocked on the door. To get help, she was preparing to leave for the nearest cabin, across the lake.

## Chapter 26

## A STRANGE SITUATION

GORDON'S desire to aid the woman was at variance with his own ideas. He had come to find his wife in the cottage of Mr. Fredericks, the notorious libertine. And that cottage, according to the information he had received, was not far distant.

And as he contemplated this woman in a moment of silence, he recalled her evident excitement when he mentioned Fredericks' name a few minutes ago.

"I—I want to help you," he said with some hesitation. "If you will tell me how far it is from here to the Fredericks cottage, I'll——" He paused because the woman uttered a low scream and threw both of her hands up.

"You can leave me," she told him, her voice vibrating with the fear that showed in every line of her beautiful features. "I do not need help from a stranger like you."

This very ungracious speech brought no response from Gordon. Somehow he felt that there was some connection between this woman and Fredericks.

"But I can't leave you," he argued. "It would be inhuman. You have told me all of your troubles and how your poor husband died. I have no desire to pry further into your private affairs, but you must let me do something for you. Haven't you any friends in the neighborhood?"

"Not man," she snapped. "I know one or two on the other side of the lake."

He nodded.

"Alright. I'll take you over to them in the boat I saw lying at the edge of the lake. After that I'll go about my own business."

When Gordon finished speaking the woman's baffling eyes swept his face suspiciously, he thought, before she reluctantly consented.

They walked down to the water's edge together, neither speaking.

After the woman was seated in the boat and he was about to take a hold of the oars, she said:

"If it is all the same to you, I'll do the rowing myself. It might not look well for me to come along with a handsome stranger like you. The people living in these Canadian mountains are dangerous gossips."

Gordon quickly left the boat.

"What do you want me to do?" he inquired.

"If you value your life go back where you came from," was the puzzling reply.

"But I came a long ways to find Mr. Fredericks," he objected. "And I won't go back without——"

"Alright, your blood will be on your own head," the woman cut him short. "I don't know what your business with Mr. Fredericks is, but you'll wish you had heeded my advice before the next twenty-four hours are gone."

With his nerves tingling, Gordon watched the woman row away. There was an element of mystery connected with all this.

Something impelled him to go back to the log cabin where the dead man lay. He was determined to wait there until the woman returned.

He did not know that she had changed her course as soon as he was out of sight. She was heading directly for the Fredericks' cottage.

Gordon, with his head lowered in deep reflection, reentered the cabin and the first thing he did was to close the door which led to the room in which the woman's dead husband lay on the floor.

The hours of travel since morning had given him a keen appetite. Despite the messy condition of the cupboard near the stove, he ate some of the baked beans and bacon he found there.

Instinctively he avoided the table, where amid the dirty dishes, an open can of peaches served as a resting place for all kinds of crawling insects.

His lunch over, he dropped into a chair and lit a cigar, determined to await the return of his strange hostess.

As his eyes took in the squalor of the room he could not help thinking that death had been kind to the trapper in the next room.

What could life hold of happiness and love and romance for such as he and his wife in this wilderness.

Unemotional and stolid, no doubt, they knew no other life, nor cared to know.

And yet, he could not remove the vision of that beautiful woman from his mind. What had prompted her to live in a place like this?

And he remembered that while she had sobbed out part of her story to him, there had been no tears in her dark eyes. Neither had there been the least trembling about her passionate, red lips.

It was all so strange and so incongruous that his curiosity was aroused to the highest pitch.

"I would like to get to the bottom of this," he muttered as he began to puff more vigorously at his cigar. "And unless I am much mistaken, she knows more about that man Fredericks than she admitted."

Continued in next number

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